

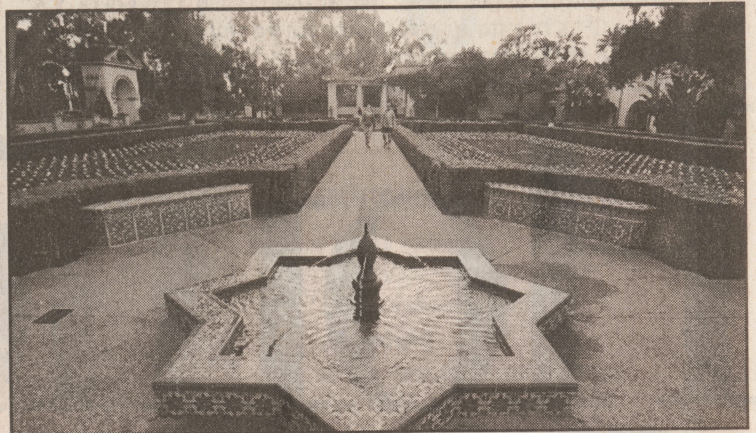
## Parks Funding Still Short

Parks departments in the nation's largest cities spent a record \$4.3 billion in 2005, the last year for which such statistics are available, but the systems still need more, the Trust for Public Land reported last month after an eight-month review.

San Diego has the third biggest parks system at 44,707 acres, trailing Jacksonville, Fla., and Houston, and it has seven of the 100 biggest parks. Two of the county's parks, Pantoja in downtown San Diego (1850) and Balboa Park (1868), are among the oldest, the survey showed.

San Diego agencies spent \$153.4 million in 2005, or \$122 per resident, giving it a ranking of 19th nationally in the review. The region ranks 15th in operating expenses at \$93 per resident — less than half the \$198 San Francisco spends — and 23rd in capital expenditures at \$29 per resident — about a fourth of top-ranked Plano, Texas, at \$114.

San Diego was far down the list in park employees for a major city park agency at 0.67



**Alcazar Garden, a Balboa Park gem.** Sean M. Haffey / Union-Tribune

employee per 1,000 residents, compared with 0.7 in Arlington, Texas, and Atlanta.

But Balboa Park ranked sixth nationally among most visited parks at 12 million visitors; 30 million visit New York City's Central Park annually.

"There is no question that cities are paying much more attention to parks," said Peter Harnik, director of the Center for City Park Excellence, who conducted the study. He said overall park spending was up about 5 percent from 2004 to

2005. "It's not a whole lot more than inflation, but it's a step in the right direction."

Harnik is helping San Diego decide whether a different governance structure would improve funding and maintenance at Balboa Park. A committee on the park is reviewing such options as creating a conservancy that could contract to provide certain park services and a special park district that would supersede the city's park department.

— ROGER SHOWLEY